



**Prepared Remarks of Attorney General John Ashcroft  
Regarding the Indictment of HAMAS  
August 20, 2004**

*(Note: The Attorney General often deviates from prepared remarks.)*

Good morning. I am joined today by Chris Wray, Assistant Attorney General of the Criminal Division, Patrick Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, and Don Van Duyn, deputy assistant director of the FBI.

**#2** Earlier this morning, an indictment by a federal grand jury was unsealed in Chicago. Three men who allegedly ran a U.S.-based terrorist-recruiting and financing cell associated with the foreign terrorist organization, HAMAS, were indicted for their roles in a 15-year racketeering conspiracy in the United States and abroad. This cell allegedly financed the activities of a terrorist organization that was murdering innocent victims abroad, including American citizens.

**#3** Muhammad Salah, of suburban Chicago, and Abdelhaleem Ashqar, of suburban Washington, D.C., were arrested last night. An arrest warrant was issued for the third defendant, Mousa Abu Marzook, who formerly lived in Louisiana and northern Virginia, now resides in Damascus, Syria, and will be considered a fugitive from justice.

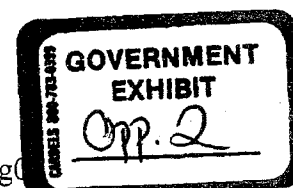
**#4** All three are charged with racketeering conspiracy for allegedly conducting - with named and unnamed co-conspirators - the affairs of HAMAS. HAMAS has been designated a foreign terrorist organization by the State Department since 1997. The racketeering acts that the HAMAS enterprise allegedly agreed to commit include:

- Multiple solicitations of first degree murder;
- Conspiracy to kill, kidnap, maim and injure persons in a foreign country;
- Material support of terrorism;
- Hostage taking; and,
- Money laundering;

**#5** Defendant Salah is also charged with providing material support - including money and personnel - to a terrorist organization. According to the indictment, in 1999 Salah directed and financed the travel of a Chicago-based associate to scout potential terrorist targets in Israel.

**#6** Defendants Salah and Ashqar are also charged with obstruction of justice. Salah is alleged to have provided sworn answers that he knew to be false in a civil suit involving the murder of an American in the West Bank. It is alleged that in February 1998 in New York, and again in June 2003 in Chicago, Ashqar, in an effort to hide his and co-conspirators' HAMAS activities, refused to testify before a grand jury despite a grant of immunity.

**#7** This indictment also seeks forfeiture of approximately \$2.7 million from accounts in the defendants' control. I note that an indictment contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.



I also note that this indictment is not a reflection on well-meaning people who practice the Muslim faith.

Throughout the 1990s, HAMAS members publicly claimed credit for multiple terrorist attacks that resulted in the death of numerous civilians and military personnel in Israel. Just a few of the attacks cited in the indictment for which HAMAS took credit are:

- An April 1994 car bombing in Israel, killing eight Israelis;
- A February 1996 suicide bombing in Jerusalem that killed 24 Israelis and two Americans;
- A May 1996 drive-by shooting at students in the West Bank in which American student David Boim was killed; and,
- Two suicide bombings in July 1997 in Jerusalem that killed 16 Israelis.

According to the indictment, between 1989 and January 1993, Salah traveled throughout the United States, Israel and the West Bank, meeting with HAMAS representatives. During these travels he is alleged to have recruited and trained new members of HAMAS, and distributed hundreds of thousands of dollars in order to support HAMAS members and activities.

In September 1992, for example, the indictment alleges that Salah traveled to the West Bank, where he met with HAMAS leaders. There, Salah was allegedly informed that HAMAS had approximately 53 recruits prepared to carry out terrorist attacks, but that funding was needed to assist them.

The indictment alleges that Salah agreed to pass on the request for money to Marzook and others. It is also alleged that on this trip, Salah provided money for the purchase of weapons by writing 10 checks, each for \$5,000, from one of his Chicago bank accounts. He then cashed them in Israel.

In the following three months, HAMAS members publicly claimed credit for eight different terrorist attacks that resulted in the deaths of numerous Israeli civilians and military personnel.

Defendant Marzook is alleged to be the deputy chief of the HAMAS Political Bureau, which functions as the leadership body for HAMAS, including coordinating terrorist acts by HAMAS.

#8

From 1988 until February 1993, while living in America, Marzook allegedly coordinated and financed the activities of HAMAS within the United States and elsewhere. The indictment alleges that during this time, Marzook also maintained numerous bank accounts in such places as Ohio, Wisconsin, New York, Louisiana, Mississippi and Virginia. To aid HAMAS, substantial sums of money - sometimes in the hundreds of thousands of dollars - were allegedly transferred in and out of these accounts, as well as overseas accounts, for disbursement inside and outside the United States.

Both Marzook and Salah have previously been designated as Specially Designated Terrorists by the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Asset Control.

Defendant Ashqar initially entered the United States as a graduate student at the University of Mississippi in Oxford. The indictment alleges that from 1989 on, Ashqar functioned as a conduit of money for HAMAS, and as an administrator for the terrorist network. He allegedly participated in HAMAS meetings in the United States, and in a number of phone conversations about HAMAS's plans. Sometimes these calls were in code.

The individuals named in this indictment are alleged to have played a substantial role in financing and supporting international terrorism. They are alleged to be material supporters of a foreign terrorist

organization, taking advantage of the freedoms of an open society to foster and finance acts of terror.

**#1** The United States makes no distinction between those who carry out terrorist attacks and those who knowingly finance, manage or supervise terrorist organizations.

**#2** This case would have been much more difficult to bring were it not for information sharing authorized by the USA PATRIOT Act. Information gathered by the intelligence community and shared with law enforcement was critical in completing this investigation and bringing this indictment.

**#3** I thank Assistant Attorney General Chris Wray. I also thank U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald, and commend the efforts of the Federal Bureau of Investigation for their efforts in this case.

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